

Introduction

The purpose of my Individual Study tour to the United States was to examine first hand the infrastructure and techniques of 'third party campaigns'. Third party campaigns are campaigns run by a single or a coalition of organisations with a particular electoral outcome as the aim. It may or may not specifically endorse one party, however it will present its key issues front and centre, guiding voters via targeted messaging to vote for one party over another.

The Your Rights @ Work campaign is an example of a third party campaign in Australia which ran alongside the 2007 Federal Election, significantly contributing to the election of the Rudd Labor Government. The key objective of my study tour to the USA was to examine ways in which unions and other progressive organisations can work and campaign together in a more coordinated and permanent way, to achieve progressive policy outcomes.

Exec Summary

Over the course of my trip I met with a number of key organisations and committed, experienced individuals, active in campaigning for a progressive political agenda. The purpose was to examine the campaign infrastructure involved in third party campaigning and how it could be implemented in Australia.

Meetings were held with:

- OnePittsburgh – Pittsburgh (Fight For A Fair Economy Campaign)
- Greg Hunt, Director America Votes – Washington D.C.
- Amy Young, Chief Client officer, Catalist - Washington D.C.
- Greenberg Quinlan Rossner Research , Catherine Silvey, Research Analyst - Washington D.C.
- SEIU – Lauree Hayden, Deputy National political Director - Washington D.C.
- AFL-CIO – Julie Greene Deputy Political Director - Washington D.C.
- MassUniting – Boston (Fight For A Fair Economy Campaign)
- Jobs with Justice, Russ Davies, Executive Director - Boston
- Harvard Law School:
 - Linda Kaboolian, Lecturer in Public Policy
 - Anna Burger, Advanced Leadership Fellow
 - Elaine Bernard, Executive Director, Labor and Work Life Program
- The Analyst Institute, Regina Schwartz – New York City

In summary, the conclusions I have drawn from this study tour are:

In order for effective third party campaigning to succeed there are a number of essential elements which must come together.

1. **An Independent Third Party Campaign Organisation**
2. **Funding**
3. **A Single Voter File**
4. **Cooperation and trust of Partners**

5. Party Political Support and Messaging Synergy

US Political and Economic Climate

As most people will know, in 2008 the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the US triggered a global economic crisis which is still being felt today, not least in America itself. The US government has spent trillions of dollars bailing out financial institutions and as a result is in significant financial debt. The Federal government spent \$700b last year alone on bail outs and stimulus packages.

National unemployment is 8.6%¹ and in some communities it is estimated to be as high as 20% and most of these are African American communities.

In spring, 2011 there were about a million homes in foreclosure in the United States, with several million more in the pipeline, and 872,000 previously foreclosed homes in the hands of banks.

In middle America, working people are struggling. Those (from all walks of life) who find themselves unemployed have little or no prospect of employment in the near future.

How to deal with debt and stimulate growth?

There is limited political appetite for increasing the level of tax paid by the wealthier and the complexities of the bi-partisan US system making it very difficult for any mandated President or Party to push through their social and economic agendas.

Bail outs and stimulus packages have left US public debt at a record high. In a society which values capitalism and economic liberalism highly, public debt is a political noose.

There are opposing views on how this should be dealt with, in brief, Republican members are pushing for cuts to government spending and services, most of which are directed to 'middle America' and the ever increasing number of people living under the poverty line. Unions, progressive organisations and most Democrats are campaigning for higher taxation of those earning \$1m or more per year (the Bush administration introduced tax cuts for the wealthy).

On the one hand many Americans feel there has already been too much intervention and governments should have little or no role in the provision of services and regulation. However there is a strong sense in disadvantaged communities that they have been let down by the Obama administration and that nothing has changed on Wall St, they still have little hope of employment or better wages and conditions. Indeed there is a feeling among the progressive movement that Obama missed major opportunities in the first 2 years of the administration to reform and revive the economy, before the Republicans took control of both Houses.

This report will not examine the political complexities stalling economic recovery, rather the campaign responses and approaches of the progressive movement, to the solutions offered by each party.

Fight for a Fair Economy – SEIU

¹ Nov 2011

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The FFE campaign is shaping up to be a significant third party campaign in the lead up to the US Presidential and Congressional elections in 2012.

1% vs. 99%

This campaign is based on the concept of the '99% versus 1%'. That is, 1% of the world (US) population holds the majority of the wealth. It is generally asserted that it was the '1%' who caused the global financial crisis and it is the 99% who are paying for it. In fact the top 1% who owned 34.6% of the nation's wealth in 2007 increased their proportional share to over 37.1% by 2009².

The campaign has been developed by the SEIU (Service Employee International Union) and launched in Easter of 2011. Essentially the union is seeking to form coalitions among community groups to influence voters (outside of their union membership) on the significant inequities in the American economy. It is currently running across 11 cities, up until the 2012 Presidential and Congressional elections.

The last Presidential election saw record voter turnout for Obama and other democratic candidates, particularly among disenfranchised groups. There is real concern that given the perceived lack of progress by Obama and the continuing recession that non- participation will be high in 2012.

It is a unique union campaign in that it does not aim to exclusively engage union members, but depressed communities with high unemployment and under-employment. The campaign also targets students struggling with crippling debt, seniors and other minority groups struggling to make ends meet.

Churches and faith groups are powerful partners in this coalition. Many of the targeted communities are African American with powerful religious leaders.

I spent time with the Pittsburgh (OnePittsburgh) and Boston (MassUniting) campaigns.

The main message of the OnePittsburgh campaign is "Good Jobs, Strong Communities & Corporate Accountability". In Boston, there is a stronger focus on the Banks and corporate accountability, particularly around aggressive foreclosure policies.

Methods of Engagements

Campaign Organisers are given geographical areas to engage with people and develop them as leaders in their communities to coordinate actions and build the campaign in their communities in the lead up to the 2012 election. These leaders are expected to bring others into the campaign sphere and engage with coalition partners right up to and including the election.

National Bridge Action Day – November 17th 2011

² Wolff, Edward N (2010). "Recent Trends in Household Wealth in the United States: Rising Debt and the Middle-Class Squeeze - An Update to 2007". *Levy Economics Institute Working Papers Series* (Social Science Research Network) (159)

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One of the common and powerful symbols of the urban decay and social decline in communities across the USA is the pitiful state of many of the bridges. Years of governments failing to invest in their maintenance and upkeep has made them dangerous and close to collapse. In Pittsburgh the Greenfield Bridge has safety nets in place to secure the pieces of concrete which shed from the bridge, preventing them from falling onto the traffic below. November 17th was Bridge Action Day in the 11 cities where the FFE campaign is active. The aim is to send a powerful message to those Republican Members who were campaigning against Obama's Jobs Act. Thousands of people across communities turned out for Rally's on the city's decrepit bridges.

The message is also closer to home, that the millions of unemployed in the USA could be put to work in their own communities in Pittsburgh repairing and the building infrastructure that makes them strong.

America Votes, Washington D.C.

America Votes (AV) is a third party coordinating/convening body providing 'neutral' campaign coordination and infrastructure for progressive organisations. Including many Labor organisations, pro-choice and environmental groups. America Votes is a trusted organisation independent of Labour and Party politics within the progressive movement that operates at both State and Federal levels.

During my time in Washington I met with Greg Hunt, Director of America Votes.

AV brings together partners with similar electoral aims, for example the election of a Democratic candidate and/or legislature at State level, or Federal.

Their principal function is to bring the various campaigns together in an organised, strategic way. This can involve list sharing, message development, voter targeting, polling, media buy and this is set up to allow participating organisations to feel confident that their membership lists are secure and their members will not.

The data system is called the VAN (Voter Activation Network). The data systems contain firewalls and protocols protecting lists.

Lists are centralised and 'washed' with the voter role. Partner organisation membership data is then extracted, and what remains are the general community members, this data is then enriched by Catalist (see next section). This information is used to carve up the lists strategically for direct voter contact.

Partners may or may not be targeting their own members in addition to the America Votes campaign.

The overall messages and themes are polled, tested and sold to the table, but there is no single script as such.

Catalist

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Catalist is essentially a data management company, though that description does not reflect the real range of data service they provide to progressive campaigns. It was set up in 2006 by the progressive community, working with the NDC to create a single national voter database. It is a for-profit entity to enable it to select clients (only progressive).

Catalist combines voter rolls with commercial data (credit rating agencies collect marketing information on individuals). They provide information to go into the VAN, software applications interface with this data. The data is constantly updated, throughout the electoral cycle.

The different subscriptions allow for varying levels of data access.

The Catalist interface differs from the VAN in that it does more detailed micro targeting and modelling, where VAN's strengths lie with list building. Modelling, matching and analysis are all key components of Catalist services

I met with Amy Young, Chief Client Director in Washington, through all of my meetings it became clear that Catalist are essential to all aspects of progressive campaigns and are used by campaign organisations and pollsters alike.

The centralisation of the Voter Files are essential to the efficiency of the NDC and third party campaigns.

Greenberg Quinlan Rossner Research & The Analyst Institute

GQR is a major player in the polling market for progressive campaigns; they provide polling and strategic analysis for campaigns and organisations. Catherine Silvey, Analyst spent some time with me, explaining the nature of their work. Catherine was also a key pollster and strategist for the 2010 Federal Labor campaign.

Polling appears to be front and centre of all US political campaigns, including third party. Testing, re-testing and finessing the message is an ongoing process in the campaigns. There wasn't the level of cynicism of pollsters and polling that there is in Australia.

The Analyst Institute is an emerging player in political polling and strategy. It combines standard polling practices with a more experimental approach in determining voter behaviour. Michael Podhorzer, Political Director of the AFL-CIO was instrumental in its setting up. Regina Schwartz, based in New York City s the primary contact for clients, I spent some time with her during my stay in NYC.

The Analyst Institute conduct real-time message testing for AFL-CIO campaigns and communications, something no other research company is currently doing.

Polling Consortiums

Another emerging aspect of progressive campaigns is the Polling Consortium, which allows progressive polling and research companies to pool polling data. This allows a greater range of data for campaigns to access, giving them broader and more accurate

AFL-CIO

AFL-CIO is the largest peak body for the Union movement in the US, committing huge resources to progressive campaigns across the country, Deputy Political Director Julie Greene met with me to discuss their involvement in campaigning and elections.

Conclusions

Through my experiences and meetings with the various campaigns and organisations, I can conclude there are a number of techniques that can be implemented by progressive organisations in Australia. Despite some significant differences in electoral and data laws there are many lessons to be gleaned by our US counter parts as well as a number of enduring issues and similarities.

It has been demonstrated both here and the USA that when progressive organisations campaign in a coordinated way it can lead to electoral success. There are a number of key factors required for this:

- 1. An Independent Third Party Campaign Organisation.** The establishment of a permanent organisation such as America Votes in Australia is essential to the ongoing success of progressive campaigning. In the 2007 Your Rights @ Work campaign, this function was provided by the ACTU, however it is my opinion that this function should be performed by an organisation that works well with the Labour movement but is not part of it. This is important an allowing non-union progressive organisations (such as The Conservation Council for example) to partner with unions without fear of any one agenda taking over. Part of the ongoing success of America Votes is that it is entirely independent and does not judge or prioritise partner's campaigns.
- 2. Funding.** Ongoing and adequate funding is required for an organisation described above to function effectively. In the USA, the Labor movement, progressive organisations and the Democrats support America Votes. Campaign organisations need to employ full time campaigners and data managers to run effective campaigns. These positions need to be in place permanently and not just 'bulked up' at election time. With the continuous election cycle and closeness of recent elections, this third party campaign organisation should be on a continuous campaign footing.
- 3. A Single Voter File.** The most efficient use of campaign resources requires all partners to be working from a single vote file. This avoids 'double up' and allows for messages to be specifically targeted.

- 4. Cooperation of Partners.** Unions and progressive organisations must be willing to share campaign plans and intelligence as well as provide their membership lists in a secure process, which does not compromise them.

- 5. Party Political Support and Messaging Synergy.** Whichever political party is being supported (explicitly or not) must reinforce the central organising message. Contradictory or unsupportive messaging from the political party will eliminate any good from the third party campaign.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to participate in this study tour, the depth of knowledge I gathered from meetings and participating with many organisations is invaluable. This 'hands on' experience is the best way to get a true understanding of the complexities of third party campaigning and examine how it can be implemented here in Australia.